10: d'Orleans--279 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 522, 533, 563, 832 Ethnic subgroups

"They [LSS: Kha boatmen in the service of a Laotian] are in good spirits, and chat from one pirogue to the other, or sing in answer to the women, who are bathing at the water's edge. The men inquire if they are married, and invite them to follow them, in case their hearts are free. The songs, often improvised, are upon subjects referring to love. They also try to frighten the buffaloes that, half hidden in the water, only show their back and the head which they hold horizontally; but the great stupid animals pay no attention to the shouts, they let us pass, contemplating us with an air of fatalistic resignation; but they do not move. In the evening our boatmen ask permission to go to the village. We grant it and follow them, however a few are left behind to keep watch over the pirogues."

10: d'Orleans--281-282 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 262, 522, 563 Ethnic subgroups

"Our men, [LSS: Kha boatmen in the service of a Laotian] have one resource, which I cannot make up my mind to try; they have picked up a kind of cricket on the banks, and after amusing themselves by making it chirp as they hold it between [282] two fingers, they throw it into the saucepan, and eat it stewed."

25: Brodrick--101 S-3 (1939) 1948 Laotians
116, 181, 522, 577

"The Laotians like to laugh, that is to say that they like to enjoy the circumstances which move them to mirth and then they like to go on laughing because laughing makes them, as all of us, feel happy...And, if it is incongruity which moves us most to laugh, then those are most happy who live in a society full of conventions whose breach is ridiculous, provided, of course, that such a breach is not such a sin, such a crime and such a misdemeanour that laughter outlaws us. The Laotian has plenty of conventions, but he feels they are made to be breached. Happy people.

The Laotian is cheerful and serene and contented, perhaps from some strange physiology of his glands, of his bodily make-up and of his environment, or of all of these, but he is most of all happy because he has but few needs."

149: Reinach--142 G-8 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

[157] 844

"When a woman feels her first pains she abstains from taking baths and swallows quantities of salt and spiced drinks. She summo a midwife and fastens a cotton thread from the bonzery around the latter's wrists. This precaution might be called the 'sanctification of hands.'

"The midwife comes to stay in the house of her client until after delivery. She is given the choicest food and commands the utmost respect. She may wash her hands only with water which has been perfumed (by means of a variety of mint). Finally, when labor pains begin, the woman sits down with her legs folded and spread wide apart. Her underskirt must be pulled down over her legs and taken in sharply at the waist by a belt. This last precaution is taken so that during the mother's efforts to deliver the child it will not go upwards towards her thorax. The midwife remains in front of the parturient woman, while relatives, friends or, more often, young men hold the woman up and try to divert her with extremely licentious remarks. Some of the young men bring musical instruments, and others bring phalli to which they address such witty reproaches that the patient, despite her pain, responds with an outburst of laughter. There is gambling, drinking and singing, and during all this time the work goes on and the woman gives birth in the midst of the gaiety.

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"No one sees the actual delivery, not even relatives. Only the midwife passes her hands under the skirt and watches attentively so as to intervene if necessary. The child is taken from the mother on a mat, the midwife draws it gently towards her and makes ready to cut the umbilical cord. The latter is cut between two ligatures made with cotton threads, and the actual section made on a weaver's shuttle with a knife which may be more or less ornate depending on the state of the family's fortune (2). The foetal part (about eight

(2) In northern Laos the cord is cut on a cylinder of green bamboo, closed at one end by a joint. The knife is a strip of bamboo cut at a sharp angle so that the siliceous bark forms the cutting edge. All iron or steel instruments are strictly forbidden. (Author's note.)

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centimeters in length) is rolled in leaves of an astringent variety and folded back on the abdomen. The child is then rubbed with slightly spiced oil.

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Then comes the feast. A suckling pig, a hen, a cock, two bowls of cooked rice, two hardboiled eggs, two small jars containing brandy, a handful of cotton threads and lighted wax candles are placed on a copper platter before a kind of altar erected in the middle of the house. In certain parts of Laos cakes and flowers take the place of these offerings, except for the rice, eggs, candles and cotton thread. These latter are obligatory, according to Laotian custom.

[193] The bride and groom kneel down before the altar, and the marriage ceremony begins. An elderly man, a sorcerer, or the man who has been the go-between in the marriage recites prayers and performs certain ritual practices. Then he attaches cotton threads to the wrists of the bride and groom so as to form bracelets. These are supposed to be "fetishes of happiness." Finally the newlyweds pour out a libation of brandy and all those present drink from the same cup after them, passing it from hand to hand.

In families of notables the bride's parents give back part of the dowry to their son-in-law after he has given it to them, as a mark of esteem and great confidence.

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If the son-in-law is to live with the bride's parents then the dowry is decreased in accordance with custom, in compensation for the labor which he will furnish to the community (1).

(1) A custom which is quite widely observed decrees that the groom shall live with his in-laws and help them with their work like a son until the time when he has a child. He is then free to go elsewhere and found a new family home. This custom is extremely ancient in origin and contributes greatly to strengthening the bonds of kinship between the groom and his in-laws.

There are cases, however, where the groom already has a house and takes his wife to live there after the marriage ceremony. The newlyweds are then accompanied by their friends. The young men take along noisy instruments with which they make a great racket, while the young women carry the bride's clothes and bedclothes to her new home.

When they reach their home a celebration takes place in which there is no shortage of brandy and during which the bride runs and shuts herself in her room so as to escape the extremely licentious remarks made by those present, who are somewhat drunk after their many libations.

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